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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Palestinian Elections

NATO - EU Relations Iran

PARIS - Thursday, January 26, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Palestinian Elections  
NATO - EU Relations  
Iran

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Domestic social and economic issues are once again prominently featured on today's front pages, with several editorials devoted to PM Villepin's employment strategy or the EU tug-of-war over reducing the VAT on construction. Inside, the Palestinian elections get wide coverage, with commentaries on the impact of a Hamas victory, both for the peace process but more widely for the region. In Le Figaro Alexandre Adler's weekly column concludes: "a unified Islamic front against the West is not in the cards because interests remain diverse."  
(See Part C)

Le Monde reports on the interim report to the European Council by the Swiss Senator Dick Marty on CIA renditions in an article entitled: "Europe Closes Its Eyes on CIA Methods." "Marty is faulting European nations for their lack of cooperation in the investigation." Another article relays the testimony of British former diplomat, Craig Murray, who is quoted: "When I was a diplomat I had proof that the U.S. transferred detainees to Uzbekistan to be interrogated. I saw CIA documents containing depositions of detainees who had been tortured. The lack of names in the report is what allows Condoleezza Rice. to pretend the U.S., as far as it knew, was not involved in such practices." Natalie Nougayrede comments: "A 2002 UN report revealed torture was practiced in Uzbek prisons."

A short article in Le Figaro emphasizes France's opposition to NATO anti-terrorism operations. (See Part C)

In Liberation editorialist Jacques Amalric comments on a "threatened UN reform." "The UN General assembly ended in a fiasco. The only idea that survived the debacle, was the need to end the scandal of the Human Rights Commission, which, through a system of bizarre nominations, had become a haven for nations which ignore the most basic human rights."

The U.S. visa situation in France is featured in Le Monde: "Passports to Discord Between France and the U.S." "To go to the U.S. one had better not be French." The report goes on: "Is it America's fault? Yes, since it is the U.S. that has made it mandatory, in the name of heightened security, for countries that are part of the visa waiver program to have a biometric passports to travel to the U.S.. On the other hand France was one of the signatory countries that agreed to comply in time. but has not." Weekly L'Express's article on visas is entitled: "American Visas: The end of the Crisis?" The report concludes: "Of the 27 countries that are concerned by the visa-waiver program, France is the only one that has not yet complied to the American regulation. Is this another example of our cultural exception?"

Economic Les Echos reports that the Americans and Japanese are returning in full force to France. Americans increased their visits by 6% over 2004 figures. 75 million tourists came to France in 2005. Several other outlets report on the figures, and regional Nice Matin carried the following commentary: "This is enough to boost our spirits: while France counts 63 million unhappy people, it also attracts 75 million visitors. Proof that all is not bad in France."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Palestinian Elections

"Hamas Challenges Fatah Monopoly"  
Patrick Saint-Paul in right-of-center Le Figaro (01/26): "The radical Islamic wing of Hamas is collecting the lion's share of the votes, upsetting the make-up of the peace process in the Middle East. With Hamas part of the government, new

questions are arising. The situation is a source of embarrassment for the EU and the U.S., which has black-listed the movement."

"Everyone Wins"

Francis Brochet in regional Le Progres (01/26): "An election does not democracy make. And democracy is not peace, especially in the Middle East. Still, these elections are the bearers of at least three sets of good news because they make three parties happy: Fatah wins with enough votes to remain in power; Hamas has lost enough in order to stay in the opposition, and Israel will be facing Fatah at the negotiating table, as it had hoped."

"From Terrorism to Democracy"

Jean Levallois in regional La Presse de la Manche (01/26): "To move from terrorism to democracy, one needs to have the blessing of the ballots and become part of the government, so as to negotiate with Israel. This also means that like Fatah, Hamas will have to recognize the existence of Israel. This is a profound evolution, which may lead to the radicalization of certain extremists and inevitably lead to further violence. But the Palestinian elections, in which all the Palestinians were either able to take part or run in, sheds light onto an evolution which may at last be going in the right direction."

"Palestinian Elections and Islamic Offensive"

Alexandre Adler in right-of-center Le Figaro (01/26): "With the Palestinian elections we are reaching the farthest point of the Islamic offensive. The Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, which has close ties to its Egyptian counterpart, will achieve a comfortable score. In the extreme, there could be a hegemonious take-over by unified Islamic forces. In Iran, Ahmadinejad would get rid of the more pragmatic wing. and suggest a common action `against all adversaries of the Muslim world.' In Egypt, the Brotherhood is closely monitoring what develops in Iran. Meanwhile, Hamas cannot abandon its basic ideology of the destruction of Israel. Despite this pessimistic overview, there are regional political and religious differences which continue to hamper this unification. It seems to me that Bin Laden's message of a truce, (the first time he has used such a word,) is a message to the Iranian Islamists: in essence, he is saying if you initiate a crisis with the U.S., we will not follow, because you continue to threaten Saudi Arabia, the heart of our movement. Therefore the initiative of a unified Islamic offensive will break up on the shoals of the diverse interest at stake."

NATO - EU Relations

"Paris Opposes NATO-EU Anti-Terrorism Meeting"

Alexandrine Bouilhet in right-of-center Le Figaro (01/26): "For France, the Atlantic Alliance's role `is not to police the world.' With this statement, France opposed a meeting last week between the EU and NATO on terrorism. arguing that terrorism was not one of the subjects of discussion between the two institutions. The problem raised by France, which considers that NATO's role is not to police the world, casts light on the worsening relations in Brussels between two institutions, which have increasingly become competitors in matters of security, with the Franco-American quarrel serving as backdrop to the controversy. A French diplomat clearly said: 'We do not want NATO to impose its agenda on the EU.' Solana, the EU foreign affairs representative, agrees. In the past several years, NATO has deployed forces in Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan, something that irritates France. Civilian NATO operations, such as humanitarian, reconstruction and anti-terrorism operations, overlap areas which the EU considers to be its own."

Iran

"Iran Wants to Cajole its `Russian Friend'"

Maurin Picard in left-of-center Le Figaro (01/26): "The U.S. yesterday rejected Iran's gesture, insisting on bringing the issue before the UNSC. Tehran previously announced that it would now accept the Russian offer of a compromise, which it had rejected in November. The Iranian maneuver, if one looks at it closely, looks more like a gesture to cajole its `Russian friend' than a real token of goodwill being given to the West. Torn, Russia is loath to choose sides: it does not want to implement sanctions against Iran. Tehran is taking advantage of the opportunity and playing on Russia's hesitations. The strategy looks very much like a new tactic on Iran's part to avoid the February 2nd deadline. But the West, which has been given the runaround for the past three years, is wary of Iran's latest offer." STAPLETON